

Shigellosis

What is shigellosis?

Shigellosis is a bacterial infection affecting the intestinal tract. It is a fairly common disease; 600-800 cases occur in New York state each year. Most cases are seen in the summer and early fall and occur as single cases or outbreaks.

Who gets shigellosis?

Anyone can get shigellosis but it is recognized more often in young children. Those who may be at greater risk include children in daycare centers, foreign travelers to certain countries, institutionalized people and active homosexuals.

How is the shigella germ spread?

Shigella germs are found in the intestinal tract of infected people and is spread by eating or drinking food or water contaminated by an infected person. It can also be spread by direct contact with an infected person.

What are the symptoms?

People exposed to the shigella germ may experience mild or severe diarrhea, often with fever and traces of blood or mucous in the stool. Some infected people may not show any symptoms.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear one to seven days after exposure but usually within two to three days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread shigellosis?

Most people pass shigella in their feces (stool) for one to two weeks. Certain antibiotics may shorten the carrier phase.

Should infected people be isolated or excluded from school or work?

Since the germ is passed in the feces of an infected person, people with active diarrhea or those who are unable to control their bowel habits should be isolated. Most infected people may return to work or school when their diarrhea ceases, provided that they carefully wash their hands after toilet visits. Food handlers, children in daycare and health care workers must obtain the approval of the local or state health department before returning to their routine activities.

How is shigellosis treated?

Most people with shigellosis will recover on their own. Some may require fluids to prevent dehydration. Antibiotics are occasionally used to treat severe cases or to shorten the carrier phase, which may be important for food handlers, children in daycare or institutionalized individuals.

What can be done to prevent the spread of shigellosis?

Since germs are passed in feces, the single most important prevention activity is careful hand washing after using the toilet.

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